

Bats, Balls, and Baseball Cards

Safeguarding Collections at the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York, collected its first artifact, the Doubleday baseball, in 1937. At that time, the museum's charge was "to establish, equip, maintain and operate a repository to collect, classify, preserve and protect records, relics, articles, and other things of historic interest connected with or pertaining to the origin, development and growth of baseball." This early mission statement fostered the growth of a fledgling institution which has become the world's leading repository of baseball history.

After the war years, interest in the "national pastime" significantly increased and the museum's collections began to grow in earnest. In 1963, the museum received the largest number of donations with almost 4,000 objects accessioned into the permanent collection. During the early years, bequests were numerous and collectors were generous. The museum presently accessions between 300 and 400 gifts per year.

Collection development occurs solely through the generosity of the general public and amateur and professional baseball players and organizations. An Accessions Committee, composed of the Curator of Collections, Registrar, Chief Curator, Librarian, and Vice President of Communications and Education, reviews potential donations and loans. This committee is charged with accepting only those items of historic significance that support the museum's education and exhibition program.

The Hall of Fame receives many inquiries regarding authentication and/or appraisal of baseball material. Although the museum is not permitted to recommend specific individuals for the authentication, appraisal, or selling of memorabilia, there are a number of organizations that can assist in this regard. Several are located on the museum's web site <www.baseballhalloffame.org>.

The museum is a not-for-profit educational institution dedicated to fostering an appreciation for the historical development of the game of baseball and its impact on our culture by collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting its collections for a global audience as well as honoring those who have made outstanding contributions to our "national pastime."

Annual visits to the museum regularly approach 350,000 and have exceeded 400,000 on several occasions. The Hall of Fame is open year-round and is closed only on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. A new membership program, "Friends of the Hall of Fame," has been established in order to further the museum's

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Artifacts from the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum Collection.



educational programs, help preserve the treasures of the game, and recount baseball's exciting and complex history.

The collections currently contain over 30,000 objects that represent all facets of the game from its inception to the present. Holdings include approximately 5,000 baseballs, 1,700 bats, 900 uniforms, 500 gloves, 250 pairs of spikes, 300 pieces of artwork, and 132,000 baseball cards. Other curated materials include ball-park-related artifacts, awards, tickets, collectibles, and assorted memorabilia.

The National Baseball Library and Archives houses the photo collection, the Giamatti Research Center, and the Recorded Media division. The photo collection contains over 400,000 images of players, teams, stadiums, events, and miscellaneous subjects. The collection includes black and white prints, color prints, slides, transparencies, and negatives. Individual collections include depictions of Hall of Fame and non-Hall of Fame players, executives, owners, and other baseball-

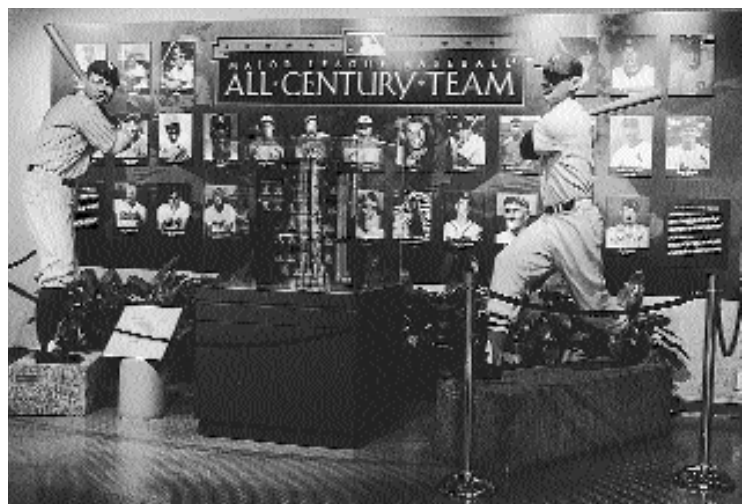
related personalities. Also archived are representations of major, minor, Negro, women's, and amateur league team photos. The oversize files house numerous original photographs dating back to the 1880s and include advertisements and cartoons.

The Giamatti Research Center houses a vast collection of baseball books, magazines, newspaper clippings, and archival materials. Thousands of volumes include biographies, histories, encyclopedias, directories, dictionaries, fiction, poetry, children's books, and foreign language books. Additional material includes 19th- and 20th-century newspapers, files on every man who ever played Major League baseball, material on many Negro League players, women players, umpires, owners, executives, broadcasters, writers, scouts, and other related individuals, baseball guides, team publications, player contract cards, day-by-day statistics, and special collections relating to teams, owners, officials, and players.

The Recorded Media division contains thousands of hours of moving image and sound recordings. The collection contains interviews, game highlights, television and radio broadcasts, animation, and music. Special highlights include material relating to the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies, game broadcasts, interviews and oral histories, documentary productions, kinescopes from the 1950s and 1960s, and hundreds of baseball songs in the recorded sound and sheet music collection.

The millions of artifacts at the National Baseball Hall of Fame are the foundation of the institution and are relied upon to support the public programming, loan program, traveling exhibitions, education program, and research needs. It is essential that the entire collection of

Main Lobby, National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.



objects be conserved and preserved for future generations to enjoy. Our updated mission seeks to preserve history, honor excellence, and inspire generations. The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum is committed to:

- Collecting through donation, baseball artifacts, works of art, literature, photographs, memorabilia and related material that focus on the history of the game over time, its players, and those elected to the Hall of Fame.
- Preserving the collections by adhering to professional museum standards with respect to conservation and maintaining a permanent record of its holdings through documentation, study, research, cataloging, and publication.
- Exhibiting material in permanent gallery space, organizing on-site changing exhibitions on various themes, with works from the Hall of Fame collection or other sources, working with other individuals or organizations to exhibit loaned material of significance to baseball and providing related research facilities.
- Interpreting artifacts through its exhibition and education programs to enhance awareness, understanding and appreciation of the game to a diverse audience.
- Honoring by enshrinement, those individuals who had exceptional careers, and recognizing others for their significant achievements.

The museum is committed to the conservation of archival materials by transporting textiles, works on paper, and other objects to professional conservation labs on a regular basis. The museum facilities were upgraded in the 1990s to protect collections by installing a state-of-the-art HVAC system which regulates humidity and temperature throughout the building. Collections are housed in climate controlled repositories and maintained by a professional staff using accepted museum practices.

Preventative conservation efforts are fundamental to the long-term preservation of any collection. It is clear that preventative conservation is paramount if the collections are to be available for future generations to enjoy. The museum recently received a full conservation assessment of exhibition and storage space. The comprehensive



report reviewed lighting, storage and exhibition atmospheric conditions, and overall philosophy.

The objects on display at the Baseball Hall of Fame are all unique and irreplaceable. Many of these artifacts are light sensitive and as such, they have a finite and short life expectancy in display conditions. It is a common museum practice to rotate exhibit objects in the interest of extending overall display life. For objects that possess special significance, all reasonable measures should be taken to preserve them by displaying them for shorter periods in order to preserve them as long as possible. However, because of this significance, these are precisely the objects that bring people long distances to the Hall—so there is a conflicting need to keep these objects on display as long as possible.

The Hall is in the process of upgrading its facility and received a \$25,000 matching grant awarded by New York State Electric & Gas, the museum's energy provider. The lighting in five major exhibits have been converted to fiber-optics and as a result, the life expectancy of baseball's most treasured artifacts has increased considerably. The new fiber-optic system eliminates light-generated heat and ultraviolet and infrared light from the exhibits and is now utilized in over two-thirds of the museum's exhibited collection. The completion of this on-going project will ensure that baseball's greatest treasures will be preserved for centuries.

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Photos by Milo Stewart, Jr.